

January 27, 2015

Chairs and Members of the Committee on Children

I am writing in support of Raised Bill No. 207, AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR A LYME DISEASE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM. I believe the Connecticut Department of Health (DPH) should be awarded \$450,000 to implement and sustain a statewide Lyme disease prevention effort combining mass media marketing and community-based education based on the BLAST Lyme prevention model.

As the mother of two children infected with Lyme disease, I have seen firsthand the devastation these infections can have on a young child. I watched as my children became shadows of who they were, unable to function in social, academic or physical activities they became homebound missing out on the multitude of experiences that make up our childhood. We were very fortunate and found compassionate, skilled and knowledgeable physicians who were able to return my children to health. This took years of treatment and a hundred thousand dollars in unreimbursed medical expenses, supportive therapies and other unexpected costs.

Years of anguish and suffering were brought on by the bite of a tick, a bite that brought my entire family to our knees - physically emotionally and financially. A bite they received while playing in our backyard, all of us unaware of the implications and risks that come from these ticks.

I started working on educational programs in 2003 hoping to spare other families from having to go through the nightmare of this very complex and controversial illness. Shortly after, at the request of our First Selectman I helped start the Ridgefield Lyme Disease Task Force. In 2008 Ridgefield was very fortunate to receive a \$50,000 grant from the State to establish a Lyme Prevention Program. Working with our local Health Department, researchers and other professional's expert in this field we created the BLAST Lyme Prevention Program. Since this initial funding we have continued to promote this program through volunteer efforts, private and community donations and sheer determination.

I have spent years presenting this program at community and corporate health fairs throughout the state, various community organizations, senior centers, schools, police and fire departments as well as our annual sidewalk sale. At every event I meet people very eager for ways to protect themselves and their families and incredibly thankful for the information we are able to provide. People have heard the horror stories and are very leery of the risks; however information on how to protect yourself while still being able to live a full and active life in this region of the country is not available.

The BLAST Program was created using the most current research on prevention of tick-borne diseases and has built name recognition as well as valuable private, corporate and public health partnerships over the past six years. Its recommendations are ones all

Connecticut citizens will benefit from. Establishing regional BLAST educators with advertising, public relations and social media marketing will allow this important prevention message to be shared throughout the state in a comprehensive manor protecting all of Connecticut's citizens.

This request for funding comes at a time when citizens are increasingly concerned that forty years after the illness was discovered in our state, Connecticut continues to have one of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the country. The problem is even more serious now that we know the same tick species that transmits the agent that causes Lyme also transmits Anaplasmosis, Ehrlichiosis and Babesiosis to people. Research has shown, if employed sufficiently, personal protection measures, and environmental tick-control measures around the home can reduce the number of cases.

Please support this legislation so we can protect our children and our families while enjoying all the beauty that Connecticut has to offer. A Statewide program that educates the citizens of CT is the only way we can prevent this epidemic from continuing to devastate so many.

Sincerely,

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